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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe the preactive decisions made by a group of elementary teachers as they plan reading instruction for ten unfamiliar children as though it were the beginning of a new school year. Participants in this simulation were provided with a complete profile on each child's school and family background. Resulting data indicated that teachers seek out such background information before making planning decisions. A majority of the teachers planned lessons that stressed particular reading skills. Teachers relied on the basal teacher's manual when planning, though a variety of materials were consulted during the preactive process. Activities, along with content, were usually specifically stated in the written plans. Teachers tended to manage the complexity of providing reading instruction to a variety of ability levels through the use of reading groups. On the average, teachers spent 6.5 hours per week on their planning, with more time spent on planning for primary grades than on intermediate. Reading and language arts received the greatest emphasis in planning. The majority of the teachers planned alone. (JD)

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Teacher Planning: A Simulation Study

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Teachers work in a highly complex environment. In order to function in that environment and meet the goals required by their position, it is assumed that teachers make plans to guide their classroom behavior.

How Teachers Plan

Several studies, using various methods, have examined how teachers plan in the classroom setting. Taylor (1970) held discussions with several groups of secondary teachers regarding their thoughts on planning. Zahorik (1975) asked 194 classroom teachers to list the decisions they usually made when planning for instruction. He also asked that they give the order in which these decisions were made. Peterson, Marx, and Clark (1978) studied 12 teachers planning three social studies lessons for junior high school students in a laboratory setting. Morine-Dershimer (1976, 1977) analyzed both long and short term planning data from a sample of 40 second and fifth grade teachers, while Yinger (1978) used a case study method to examine the planning of one primary teacher.

The data of these studies present the following picture of teacher planning. The choice of objectives does not appear to be the cornerstone of teacher planning as described in the traditional planning literature. Teachers are more interested in delineating the content or subject matter information that will be used during the lesson for which they are planning.

Decisions about materials are closely associated with decisions about content. However, studies have not always found that decisions about materials were pervasive in planning. It should be remembered that many of the materials found in classrooms were assigned by the school districts and decisions about materials use are usually made at only one point during the year. Materials may determine just what a teacher teaches , and therefore, what a student learns. The delineation of content to be covered during instruction may come from the materials which teachers have available to them. Materials provide a common starting point in determining content, but teachers may vary in the way the materials are used and how quickly the content is covered (Filby, Marliave, and Fisher, 1977).

Decisions related to lesson activities are central to the planning process. Yinger (1978) found that "nearly all action and interaction in the classroom took place within the boundaries of an activity, and for the most part, the remaining time was used for preparation for or a transition between activities (p. 13)". These findings support the contention by MacDonald (1965) and Eisner (1967) that activities rather than objectives form the basis of teacher planning. Teachers use the choice of activities as a focus for making other instructional decisions.

Although teaching strategies are difficult to isolate from the consideration of student and teacher activities, they appear to play some role in teacher planning. Decision making models stress the choice of a particular activity from a variety of alternatives, yet there have been no findings which indicate teachers actually behave in this manner. These decisions may simply not be reflected in the written plans of teachers, although studies of interactive decision making show that it is rare for teachers to consider alternative strategies while they are teaching (Clark and Peterson, in press).

Few studies have documented that teachers attend to the physical space in their classroom, however, it is assumed that these may be unstated rather than no decision at all (Morine-Dershimer, 1977).

Results of several studies indicate that diagnosis is not commonly observed as a component of planning. Teachers do appear interested in information which will help them to ascertain a pupil's ability level. This may assist the teacher in limiting the choice of instructional options and provide an anchor for planning.

Written lesson plans rarely reveal the kind of management and organizational decisions that it is assumed teachers must make to work in the classroom. Evaluation decisions are also rarely seen in studies examining teacher planning.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to describe the preactive decisions made by a group of elementary teachers as they plan reading instruction for ten unfamiliar children as though it were the begin-

ning of a new school year. Reading was chosen as the subject matter because it is one of the few content areas taught by the majority of classroom teachers. Also, studies have shown that teachers allocate a large portion of their available instructional time for reading which indicates a great deal of their preactive decision making must be related to reading instruction. If teachers do spend a large portion of their preactive time on reading decisions, then these decisions might shed some light on the entire preactive process.

Method

Subjects

A volunteer group of 70 elementary teachers provided the data for the study. First, second, and third grade teachers were classified as primary; fourth and fifth grade teachers as intermediate. There were 39 primary and 31 intermediate teachers.

Demographic data was collected from each subject. Teachers ranged in age from 22 to 67 years with a mean age of 31.8, a median of 28, and a standard deviation of 10.53. The relative youth and inexperience of the teachers involved is also reflected in their years of teaching experience, variety of experience and degree level. Six of the 70 teachers (9%) were in their first year of teaching. The mean number of years of experience was 7.83 with a range of 1 to 42 years and a standard deviation of 8.42 years. Thirty-one percent of the teachers had experiences at only one grade level; 51% at between two and five grade levels, and 18% had specialized experiences either inside or outside the elementary school.

The majority of teachers (68%) had only a bachelors degree in some area of education. Thirty-two percent had received a masters degree in education. There were no reports of study beyond that level.

Procedure

Teachers were assigned to one of three planning simulations in which they were asked to plan reading instruction for ten unfamiliar children as though it were the beginning of a new school year. Teachers were told to assume that they were working in their own school, at the same grade level, and would be using the same materials as were currently found in their classrooms.

Because the aim of the study was to examine the preactive planning of teachers, and not their interactive decision making, a choice was made to focus on the first contacts of a new school year. While most of the planning done by elementary teachers is tested in the interactive setting and then incorporated into the next series of preactive decisions, these series of relationships must begin somewhere. It is assumed that the decisions that teachers make before interacting with children are indicative of their concerns throughout the school year.

The information obtained by this method may also provide a framework from which the complex interactions of preactive and interactive planning may be examined. Knowing that a teacher attends to the reading ability of a particular student when planning the initial instructional encounter, may explain the lack of attention to student needs later on in the sequence of instructional events. This would not be immediately apparent if plans were examined at only one point during the sequence. An investigator examining an isolated lesson plan may form certain conclusions about what features are or are not included in plans. If the investigator were as thoroughly familiar with the group of children as the teachers who were planning, particular nuances in their written plans may have indicated attention to the missing features. Another approach is to confront teachers with a new group of students for whom to plan. In that case, teachers will be more likely to make specific references to various lesson plan features (attention to student needs, activities, evaluation, etc.). These references could serve as a reminder to be used to guide the interactive behavior of the teacher. Once this information is internalized, it is less likely to be written down.

The simulations varied in the amount of time for which the teachers were asked to plan. The time periods were varied in order to obtain the largest amount of information about what teachers were thinking when planning for instruction. Research has indicated that examining the features of written lesson plans for an isolated series of lessons or an individual lesson does not provide a detailed picture of teacher planning. These written plans tend to be sketchy, concentrating on the activities and content to be covered (Zahorik,

1975; Peterson et al., 1978). The Morine (1976) study which asked teachers to describe an entire year's reading program provided additional data concerning preactive decision making. If teachers develop styles and routines of teaching, these may not be reflected in lesson plans covering a brief instructional period (Yinger, 1978). Plans written for three different instructional periods will provide a basis for comparing planning features.

Teachers were assigned to only one simulation allowing for a complete analysis of the information requested for that period and the preactive concerns of the teacher when contemplating that time frame. The situation presented in all three simulations was that the classroom teacher had broken her leg and would be unable to attend the first several weeks of school. A novice teacher, one who had previously student taught in the same school, would be taking over the class. Since the teachers in the Morine (1976) study had indicated a need for student teachers to prepare and follow detailed lesson plans, it was hoped that setting up the situation in this manner would lead to the preparation of more detailed plans than if the classroom teachers were preparing only for themselves or for an experienced substitute.

Simulation Validity

The validity of the simulations was determined by asking teachers to describe the differences between the way in which they usually plan and the way they were asked to plan in the simulations. Of the 70 teachers, 61 responded to the question. Forty-three percent of the respondents claimed there was no difference between the way they usually planned and the manner in which they planned during the simulation task. Eighteen percent of the remaining teachers cited the lack of interaction with students as the major difference. No other differences were expressed by more than 10% of the respondents. Occasionally, a teacher cited more than one difference. Difference comments included (in rank order with the most teacher citations first) planning with less detail, having additional information during the planning process, and planning in a more relaxed atmosphere.

Materials

Teachers in this study had to request information from a controlled data bank in order to find out about students for whom they were planning. This data bank is identical to that used in the 1976 Morine study. It consists of complete sets of records at each grade level for the ten children who comprised the representative group for which the teacher was preparing. The records included data on the following:

-health and attendance
-family background
-teachers' comments
-parent conferences
-report cards
-psychological consultations
-test results
-sociometric data
-previous reading programs
-information on special services

Data Analysis

Features of teacher planning as suggested by the traditional planning model and the extensions of that model in the educational literature form the basis of the coding conventions used to analyze the lesson plans. These coding conventions can be seen in Table 1. It should be noted that the same coding conventions were used for all lesson plans regardless of the time period for which teachers were planning. This allowed for comparisons which would indicate if certain planning features are attended to more often in any particular time frame.

Once individual plans had been coded, the categories and subcategories were tabulated. Each feature of planning was then organized according to the grade level of the teacher and the time period for which the teacher was planning. As the data generated was categorical in nature, significant differences were examined using chi-square tests. The aim of the study was to describe rather than test so a .10 level of significance was used.

Results

Tables 2 and 3 show the frequency and percent of the lesson plan coding categories by grade level and simulation. Tables 4 and 5 provide the data concerning the use of materials during planning. Table 6 shows the sources of information requested by teachers dur-

ing the planning process.

A picture of teacher planning

The data indicated that teachers do seek out information about students prior to making planning decisions. The majority of teachers appear interested in developing a profile of the student's reading ability and requested information concerning previous reading materials, reading grades, reading expectancy, and skill or comprehension check lists.

There was little attention given to objectives in the written plans of both primary and intermediate teachers regardless of the simulation task for which the teachers were planning. The content of the plans was generally specific. A majority of the teachers planned lessons which stressed particular reading skills. These skills included vocabulary, comprehension, critical reading, and literature. Only half of the teachers included language arts skills as part of the content of their lessons.

Teachers were more likely to rely on the basal teachers' manual when planning, although a variety of materials were consulted during the preactive process.

Activities, along with content, were usually specifically stated in the written plans. Most teachers planned on using the discussion/explanation, written work, and testing categories of activities during their lessons. There were a variety of activities discussed in the plans.

Grouping was cited by a majority of teachers. Teachers tended to manage the complexity of providing reading instruction to a variety of ability levels through the use of reading groups. There was little attention paid to other management and organizational concerns. Teachers also tended to ignore evaluation procedures in their plans.

Survey Analysis

Additional analyses were completed for data collected on the survey forms which teachers completed after the simulation task. These survey forms were designed to provide detailed information on the typical planning procedures of the teachers involved in the study. The following information was obtained:

-On the average, teachers spend 6.5 hours per week on their planning. The range for primary teachers indicates that more time is spent on planning for reading in the primary grades than in the intermediate grades (.5-18 hours vs. .17 to 7 hours).

-Reading and language arts received the greatest emphasis in planning by both primary and intermediate teachers followed in rank order by math, social studies, and science.

-The majority of the teachers (56%) planned alone.

Discussion

The data indicate that there is an initial attempt to find information about students that will define their reading ability. This information can usually be ascertained from reading levels, standardized test data, report card grades, and teacher comments. This need to define the parameters of ability is related to the pervasiveness of decisions concerning the scope of the lesson in terms of content and materials. The number one concern of teachers as they plan appears to be what to do with the students. This can be answered more readily by knowing what the students have previously mastered and what they can be expected to accomplish.

Information other than that defining ability level is available to teachers. This information includes personal characteristics, special services, family background, and health and attendance records. Teachers may seek this data when they are planning for periods of instruction beyond a single lesson or have more time to learn about their students. This study provided conflicting data, however. Significant differences were found for teachers who spent less time on planning and teachers planning for longer periods of instruction. They both asked for family background data more frequently.

Shavelson, Caldwell, and Izu (1977) found that teachers used data about students when choosing materials. They suggested that teachers may use different sources of information when making a variety of decisions. Along this line, teachers could conceivably make differential use of student information when making decisions. For example, they may use some of the student data (reading scores, etc.) to make a decision about the scope of the lesson in terms of content and materials and other data (teacher comments, etc.) to plan the more affective aspects of classroom interaction.

The educational planning model suggests that the selection of objectives is the first decision a teacher should make. Studies examining teacher planning have found little attention paid to objectives, though. This study confirmed such findings. The possibility that teachers planning for greater periods of instructional time would mention objectives was not supported by the data. It appears that objectives are not part of the typical planning procedures of teachers. It may be that the selection of objectives is usually considered outside of the preactive planning period. Major objectives at each grade level could be internalized to such an extent that they appear to be taken for granted while teachers concentrate on the scope of the lesson and the way in which the content is transmitted.

The majority of the teachers in this study clearly specified content. It appears that content and materials provide the basis for planning activities which were pervasive in the written plans.

The importance of management and organizational concerns in teacher planning has been stressed in recent literature (Kounin, 1970; Brophy and Evertson, 1976). Management and organization concerns were defined in this study as including attention to the physical environment, seating, grouping, and unsupervised group decisions. Most of the written plans reflected attention to grouping concerns. This may have been due to the subject matter under consideration and the pervasiveness of grouping in the teaching of reading. As in other studies, little attention was paid to other management and organization concerns.

Recent studies of teacher planning did not uncover attention to pupil needs as a part of preactive decision making. This study hypothesized that plans written for periods of instructional time longer than a single lesson would show greater attention to student needs. The majority of teachers in this study, regardless of the simulation, used diagnostic testing procedures as an aid in gathering data about student needs. This may have been an artifact of the simulation design. All teachers were planning for a new school year with a group of unfamiliar children. The fact that teachers were more likely to attend to student needs in this situ-

ation rather than when planning a single lesson at other points of the year stresses the importance of timing when considering teacher planning. The content of teacher planning may well vary over different periods during the school year. For example, attention to student needs may be quite pronounced early in the school year and in the beginning of new units of study. This feature of teacher planning may be less visible at other times during the year. Future research on teacher planning may need to consider this qualification.

Evaluation decisions are probably not part of the typical planning procedures. Instead, like objectives, these decisions must be made at other times. Evaluation decisions may be made in the interactive phase of teaching immediately following the lesson to be evaluated.

The traditional educational planning model does not adequately represent the way in which teachers plan. The model assumes that teachers make decisions about objectives, content, activities, materials, and evaluation with equal intensity. Data indicate, however, that written plans reflect little or not attention to objectives and evaluation while content, activities, and materials decisions are highly visible.

Decision making models appear to offer a promising alternative. Recent studies based on the Shavelson (1976) model are investigating several of the attributes of teacher decision making in the preactive phase. Research based on this model may offer new insights into the content of the decisions which teachers make. A broader picture of how teachers choose classroom behaviors and set up the classroom environment may also emerge from such studies.

Research will need to look at the situational limitations on teacher planning. Individual teacher skills, teaching preferences, and perceptions of pupil needs are teacher characteristics which need to be examined. The milieu of the classroom also needs to be studied; the school district's administrative and curricular guidelines, school facilities, organizational patterns, materials and personnel resources (Harnischfeger and Wiley, 1975).

Using simulations to produce written plans is only one of the many methods needed to gather data about teacher planning. Not everything a teacher considers will be mentioned in written plans.

Other procedures need to be utilized in gathering additional data which can provide a fuller and more detailed idea of teacher planning. Stimulated recall, case studies, and the use of ethnographic techniques have already contributed. Varied techniques with varied populations will increase the validity and the generalizability of earlier findings.

What do these results mean for teacher training programs? Teachers are concerned with the content, materials, and methods of activities. Thus, the choice of content, materials, and method could provide a foundation for a training program.

Much of teacher planning reflected in written plans appears to be procedural. Little is known about what kinds of thinking occurs before teachers write down their instructional intentions. Decision making models hypothesize that teachers set goals, evaluate students, list possible instructional alternatives, and choose the alternative which has the highest likelihood of allowing students to meet the goals. Perhaps these skills should form the nucleus of programs designed to enhance planning skills.

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Table 1 Lesson Plan Coding Conventions

I. OBJECTIVES
- Behavioral
- General
- No objectives

II. CONTENT
- Vaguely Implied
- Specific:
  - language arts skills
  - reading skills
  - phonetic skills
- Other
- No content emphasis

III. ATTENTION TO STUDENT NEEDS
- Diagnostic Testing
- Attention to student responses
- Other
- No attention to student needs

IV. MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION
- Physical Environment
- Grouping
- Seating
- Unsupervised Groups
- Other
- No management and organization

V. ACTIVITIES
- Vaguely Implied
- Specific:
  - testing
  - games
  - written work
  - creative writing
  - discussion/explanation
  - learning centers
  - dramatization
- Other
- No activities

VI. EVALUATION PROCEDURES
- Testing
- Attention to student responses
- Other
- No evaluation

Table 2 FREQUENCY, PERCENT, AND CHI-SQUARE COMPARISONS OF LESSON PLAN CODING CONVENTIONS BY GRADE LEVEL

Category	Primary n 39		Intermediate n 31			
	F	%	F	%	CHI-SQ[a]	p[b]
I. OBJECTIVES						
Behavioral	0	0	2	6	.53	NS
General	10	26	9	29	.08	NS
No objectives	29	74	20	65	.80	NS
II. CONTENT						
Vaguely Implied	2	5	1	3	.05	NS
Language Arts	16	41	17	55	1.33	NS
Reading	30	77	26	84	.52	NS
Phonetic Analysis	25	64	19	61	.06	NS
Other	1	3	1	3	.32	NS
No Content	2	5	2	6	.09	NS
III. ATTENTION TO STUDENT NEEDS						
Diagnostic Testing	29	74	18	58	2.06	NS
Attention to student response	21	54	12	39	1.59	NS
Other	4	10	3	10	.09	NS
No attention	4	10	7	23	1.12	NS
IV. MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION						
Physical Environment	1	3	1	3	.33	NS
Grouping	34	87	20	65	5.03	**
Seating	0	0	0	0	0	NS
Unsupervised Groups	10	26	8	26	0	NS
Other	0	0	0	0	0	NS
No Management and Organization	5	13	9	29	2.83	NS

Table 2 (Con't)

Category	Primary F	Primary %	Intermediate F	Intermediate %	CHI-SQ	p
V. ACTIVITIES						
Vaguely Implied	0	0	0	0	0	NS
Testing	28	72	18	58	1.47	NS
Games	14	36	9	29	.37	NS
Written Work	30	77	24	77	0	NS
Discussion/Explanation	31	79	28	90	1.58	NS
Learning Centers	8	21	3	10	1.58	NS
Dramatization	3	8	6	19	1.16	NS
Others	26	67	25	81	1.68	NS
No activities	0	0	0	0	0	NS
VI. EVALUATION						
Testing	4	10	7	23	1.12	NS
Attention to student response	1	3	4	13	1.48	NS
Other	2	5	6	19	2.23	NS
No Evaluation	33	85	20	65	3.86	**

[a]df for all chi square comparisons equals 1.

[b]NS $p > .10$

* $p < .10$

** $p < .05$

Table 3 FREQUENCY, PERCENT, AND CHI-SQUARE COMPARISONS OF LESSON PLAN CODING CONVENTIONS BY SIMULATION

Category	Simulation One n 23		Simulation Two n 24		Simulation Three n 23			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	CHI-SQ[a]	p[b]
I. OBJECTIVES								
Behavioral	1	4	0	0	1	4	.12	NS
General	9	39	5	21	5	22	2.47	NS
No objectives	13	57	19	79	17	74	3.12	NS
II. CONTENT								
Vaguely Implied	2	9	1	4	0	0	1.29	NS
Language Arts	13	57	13	54	7	30	3.79	NS
Reading	18	78	21	88	17	74	1.42	NS
Phonetic Analysis	16	70	16	66	12	52	1.76	NS
Other	0	0	1	4	1	4	.89	NS
No content	1	4	1	4	2	9	.06	NS
III. ATTENTION TO STUDENT NEEDS								
Diagnostic Testing	18	78	16	67	13	57	1.57	NS
Attention to student response	8	35	14	58	11	48	2.50	NS
Other	2	9	3	13	2	9	.04	NS
No attention	4	17	4	17	3	13	.02	NS
IV. MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION								
Physical Environment	0	0	1	4	1	4	.13	NS
Grouping	20	87	19	79	15	65	3.16	NS
Seating	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	NS
Unsupervised Groups	4	17	8	33	6	26	4.01	NS
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	NS
No management & organization	3	13	5	21	6	26	.57	NS

Table 3 (Con't)

	Simulation One		Simulation Two		Simulation Three			
Category	F	%	F	%	F	%	CHI-SQ	p
V. ACTIVITIES								
Vaguely Implied	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	NS
Testing	15	65	18	75	13	57	1.75	NS
Games	7	30	10	29	6	23	1.5	NS
Written Work	15	65	22	92	17	74	4.67	*
Creative Writing	11	48	11	46	8	35	.96	NS
Discussion/Explanation	17	74	22	92	20	87	1.71	NS
Learning Centers	7	30	3	13	1	4	4.22	NS
Dramatization	7	30	2	8	0	0	7.36	**
Other	13	57	20	83	18	78	4.92	*
No activities	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	NS
VI. EVALUATION								
Testing	6	26	3	13	2	9	1.77	NS
Attention to student response	3	13	1	4	1	4	.6	NS
Other	3	13	4	17	1	4	.73	NS
No evaluation	16	70	17	71	20	87	2.37	NS

[a] df for all chi-square comparisons equals 2.

[b] NS $p > .10$

* $p < .10$

** $p < .05$

Table 4: Frequency, Percent, and Chi-Square Comparisons of Materials consulted during planning by grade level

	Primary n=23		Intermediate n=21			
Category	F	%	F	%	CHI-SQ[a]	p[b]
basals	18	78	18	86	.04	NS
screening tests	8	35	10	48	.73	NS
personal materials	4	17	6	29	.25	NS
teacher training materials	4	17	7	33	1.4	NS
reading kits	6	26	8	38	.71	NS
media	5	22	5	24	.04	NS

[a]df for all chi-square comparisons equals 1.

[b]NS $p > .10$

Table 5 Frequency, Percent, and Chi-Square Comparisons of Materials Consulted during Planning by Simulation

Category	Simulation One n=13		Simulation Two n=14		Simulation Three n=13			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	CHI-SQ[a]	p[b]
basals	12	92	14	82	8	57	3.15	NS
screening tests	7	54	8	47	3	21	3.37	NS
personal materials	2	15	6	35	2	14	1.14	NS
teacher training materials	5	38	4	24	2	14	1.04	NS
reading kits	6	46	5	29	3	21	1.03	NS
media	4	16	3	18	3	21	.24	NS

[a]df for all chi-square comparisons equals 2.

[b]NS $p > .10$

Table 6 Frequency and Percent of Information Requests per Category

Category	F[a] n=52	%
reading level	40	77
special services	16	31
test results	28	54
grades & comments	22	42
personal characteristics	12	23
family background	12	23
health/attendance	10	19

[a]Teachers could choose more than one category of information requests.